GUIDE TO THE SO8 TIMBIRA FILE

[The Eastern Timbira or simply Timbira (Canella, Cran) as they are generally called, are composed of a number of subgroups, chief among which are the Apanyecra, Craho, Crepumcateye, Creye, Cricati, Cucoecamecra, Gaioes, Kencateye, Porecamecra, Pucobye, Ramcocamecra (Capiecran), Shacamecra and Timbira proper. These groups occupy an area in the northeastern part of the Central Brazilian steppes where that region adjoins the southeastern tip of the Amazon rain forest, roughly from 3^{o} - 9^{o} South latitude and from 42^{o} - 49^{o} West longitude. The Timbira are all Ge-speakers but with some dialectic differences between groups.

The population of the Eastern Timbira has steadily declined since contact with White-Brazilian civilization. A recent estimate of the Ramcocamecra population gives a general figure of from 250-500 people. This figure integrated with Nimuendajú's scattered data for 1914-1915 and 1929-1936 and the 1919 census data prepared by the Serviço do Proteção aos Indios would probably give a total estimated population of not more than 600-800 people for all the Timbira groups.

Timbira villages were laid out in a circular pattern which was tied in with their socio-ceremonial organization. The houses were occupied by matrilocal extended families associated with the two exogamous matrilineal moieties into which the village was divided. In the center of the village was the open plaza connected to each house by a radial path. House types varied between Timbira subgroups and even within a single village itself. At one time dwellings

were probably conical in shape, but today they are basically rectangular in form, with thatched hip roofs. The modern Timbira, however, still use the beehive-shaped and conical house types for ceremonial occasions or in temporary camp construction. Each village enjoyed political autonomy under a headman and a council of elders. The headman or chief exercised little political control and displayed a minimum of individual assertiveness, for the omnipresent ceremonial regulated most of the social life and it was the primary duty of the chief and council to maintain the customary law rather than legislate anew. Although headmen did enjoy prestige in their respective villages, as indicated by certain rules of etiquette applicable to them alone, they worked as hard to make a living as did other members of their village.

Formal age grades without other significant class stratification, including absence of slavery, were characteristic of the Timbira. Coupled with this was an elaborately developed moiety system, especially among the Ramcocamecra, the group studied so extensively by Nimuendajú. This group not only had age-class moieties, but also matrilineal exogamous moieties, nonexogamous rainy season moieties and plaza moieties, as well as separate men's societies.

All the Eastern Timbira groups are strictly monogamous, and their traditions report not a single polygynous or polyandrous union. Marriage involves no bride-price and is forbidden to any relatives of the first and second degree in the ascending or descending generation. Cross-cousin marriages were forbidden symmetrically. Nimuendajú reports that he saw no cases of the sororate among the many subgroups of Timbira he visited and only one case of the levirate. Formerly the majority of youths married their fiancées in a joint ceremony immediately following

the close of the last phase of the initiation festival. The last collective wedding of this sort seems to have occurred in 1913.

Religion among the Timbira was not very well developed, and what existed was generally animistic in nature. Public ceremonials were few in number and apparently undertaken to invoke the heavenly bodies to protect food plants and animals. They did, however, have numerous beliefs about celestial phenomena. Shamans were present in the society and their efforts were primarily directed towards curing the sick, although on occasion they could use their powers for the purposes of sorcery.

Kinship terminology was of the Crow type (i.e., FaSiCh was equated with kinsmen of a higher generation and/or MoBrCh with kinsmen of a lower generation), with bifurcate merging avuncular terminology also present.

The SO8 Timbira file consists of two sources, one in English and the second, a translation from the German (3: Kissenberth). The primary source for the file is the classic study of the Eastern Timbira by Curt Nimuendajú (1: Nimuendajú). In this source the author gives a comprehensive and critical summary of the classification of the Ge-speaking people in which his firsthand knowledge is decisive. His account of the history of the Timbira and the component tribes is even more thorough. The bulk of the ethnographic description of the contemporary Timbira refers to the Ramcocamecra (among whom he lived for thirteen and a half months) although relevant information on

the other Timbira groups is also incorporated in the source. An excellent bibliography and glossary are also appended.
3: Kissenberth presents a collection of miscellaneous ethnographic information based on what seems to have been a stay of less than a day (Oct. 12, 1908) in a Timbira village called Suridade. This source includes descriptive data on the objects of material culture which the author collected during his brief visit, plus some additional historical information. The file is relatively limited in depth of field coverage (1908, 1929-1936) but it does provide enough ethnographic data to make it useful for cross-cultural research. The file was processed between 1955-1968.]